

INFO	LOG-00	AID-00	AMAD-00	CIAE-00	INL-00	DNI-00	DODE-00
	DOTE-00	PERC-00	DS-00	EAP-00	EB-00	FAAE-00	FBIE-00
	VCI-00	H-00	TEDE-00	INR-00	LAB-01	VCIE-00	NSAE-00
	ISN-00	NIMA-00	ISNE-00	DOHS-00	FMPC-00	SP-00	IRM-00
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INFO ALL US CONSULATES IN MEXICO COLLECTIVE

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C O N F I D E N T I A L MEXICO 003148

SENSITIVE

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 06/06/2016

TAGS: PGOV, PINR, PREL, MX

SUBJECT: PRESIDENTIAL DEBATE: CALDERON ON POINTS, AMLO ON
EXPECTATIONS

REF: MEXICO 2240

Classified By: AMBASSADOR ANTONIO O. GARZA, JR., REASONS: 1.4(B/D).

1. (SBU) SUMMARY: In the second and final of the presidential debates, front-running candidates Felipe Calderon of the National Action Party (PAN) and Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador (AMLO) of the Party of the Democratic Revolution were widely perceived to have debated to a near draw. The debate focused on the issues of public security, governability, foreign policy/migration, federalism and state reform. Although the majority of instant polls and commentators gave a slight advantage to Calderon, several gave the edge to AMLO. In our view, Calderon won narrowly on substance and debating points, while AMLO succeeded in portraying himself as measured, responsible and presidential, and probably connected better with the masses. Roberto Madrazo of the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) improved his performance over that of the first debate, but most commentators, including some from his own party, suggested the improvement was too little, too late. On the issue of foreign policy, all five candidates promised to seek an immigration accord with the United States, with AMLO

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stating that he sought a mutually respectful and cooperative bilateral relationship. Unlike Calderon's clear victory in the first debate (reftel), which yielded a significant post-debate bounce, we believe that the second debate will have a less pronounced -- and perhaps less predictable -- impact on a race that remains in a technical, two-way tie. End summary.

Polls and Pundits Yield No Clear Victor

2. (SBU) Instant polls taken after the debate, as well as the majority of commentators canvassed, tended to give a slight advantage to Calderon, although they were far from unanimous in doing so. A nationwide telephone poll taken by leading daily Reforma revealed that 44% of respondents considered Calderon the winner, as compared with 30% for AMLO, and 11% for Madrazo. A panel of approximately 200 pundits and opinion makers canvassed by Reforma showed a 54% to 31% to 9% victory for Calderon over AMLO and Madrazo, respectively. El Universal saw the outcome of the debate in less clear-cut terms. It canvassed five small focus groups convened in Mexico City, Monterrey, Guadalajara, Toluca (Mexico State), and Veracruz; all but the focus group in Veracruz opined that AMLO had emerged the winner. Although an Excelsior poll called the debate for Calderon, 37% to 28%, Diariomonitor called it for AMLO, 56% to 37%.

Calderon Again Proves a Sure-footed Debater

3. (SBU) Calderon's substantive, quick-witted performance undoubtedly consolidated his support among his core constituencies in the middle (and upper) class, while he sought to reach a broader audience by emphasizing his sensitivity to social problems. As in the April debate, he proved skillful at enumerating his policy prescriptions, in offering well-placed attacks against his opponents -- principally AMLO -- and in responding effectively to their charges.

4. (U) Arguing that this election would set Mexico's course for the next 25 years, Calderon urged voters to opt for his program emphasizing the rule of law, employment, and economic certainty. With respect to public security, he proposed unifying the various branches of the federal police, revamping an ineffective Mexico City police force, instituting life sentences for kidnappers and other serious criminals, and instituting oral trials. He criticized AMLO's stewardship of Mexico City, charging that criminality had

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increased significantly during his term. He said he would seek to form a coalition or national unity government to promote governability and emphasized the importance of order, observing that machetes must not be permitted to prevail over the rule of law. Turning to foreign policy, like his rivals he proposed an immigration accord with the U.S. and pledged to support small-scale farmers when the Mexican corn and bean market is opened to NAFTA in 2008. He pledged to seek U.S. and Canadian assistance for those states producing the most migrants.

5. (SBU) With respect to state reform, he pledged absolute transparency in government finances, advocated reducing public funding of political parties, and reducing the number of members of Congress. In his closing remarks, he reiterated his frequent assertion that AMLO represented a "danger" for Mexico.

6. (SBU) Note: Prior to the extensive work done by post with Mexican states on the issue of oral trials, the topic of justice reform was not a priority for any of the political parties and was seen by some as an American imposition. Last week, the campaigns of the three leading candidates requested an update on USAID-funded rule of law reforms, which was provided to all five campaigns. This information was drawn on in last night's debate by four of the five candidates -- AMLO making only a passing reference -- and formed a central part of the public security discussion. End note.

AMLO: The Great Unknown Surprises Many

7. (SBU) Having not participated in the first debate, some observers doubted AMLO would be able to stand tow-to-toe with Calderon in a setting in which he had little experience. Nevertheless, AMLOs polished performance handily surpassed those low expectations -- undermining the Chavez-esque image portrayed by some detractors -- and his common touch undoubtedly connected with many ordinary Mexicans. While he evinced a preference for broad themes rather than concrete policy proposals, AMLO spoke in measured, even reassuring tones, and seemed confident and presidential.

8. (SBU) AMLO framed the election as offering a choice between two competing visions, one offering a new economic model that would favor the disadvantaged and end the elite's privileges, and one offering "more of the same (as always)." For example, with respect to public security, AMLO said he

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would fight crime by addressing the root problems, poverty and family disintegration, adding that he would also expand the army's role in fighting crime. He argued that governability would remain a challenge as long as rampant inequality prevailed in Mexico. Nevertheless, quoting Mexican icon Benito Juarez, he ruled out solving social conflicts with force, promising to respect the constitution and the division of powers. He proposed a non-interventionist and non-activist foreign policy and proved conciliatory towards the U.S., favoring a bilateral relationship based on the principle of mutual respect and cooperation. He said that the problem of migration could not be solved with walls and that he favored an immigration accord, adding that ultimately, the problem had to be addressed at its roots, by creating jobs in regions that are "expelling migrants." He said he hoped to see China play a larger economic role in Latin America.

9. (U) On the issue of federalism and regional development, he proposed (i) guaranteeing farm commodity prices to strengthen the agricultural sector; (ii) stimulating the construction and tourism sectors; and (iii) modernizing the energy sector, without permitting privatization. As for state reform, he ruled out the now pending structural reforms allegedly favored by the "elite." In their place, he proposed raising the right to various forms of social welfare to "constitutional rank," and establishing the mechanisms of referenda, plebiscite and recall elections.

10. (SBU) Reviewing last night's performance, a contact in the AMLO campaign told poloff that the significance of the debate was not whether AMLO had won or lost, but whether he had succeeded in presenting the image of a prudent, self-controlled leader who cared about the common people. In that, she concluded, AMLO's performance was a resounding success.

Madrazo's Improvement Too Little Too Late

11. (SBU) Although Roberto Madrazo improved significantly on his poor performance in the first debate, his style remained unengaging, and virtually all commentators agreed that any improvement was too little, too late.

12. (SBU) As for substance, Madrazo strongly emphasized his public security credentials, reiterating that criminals feared him. He lamented the tendency towards negative campaigning, suggesting that all the candidates sign a civility pact after the debate. He termed President Fox's

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foreign policy "a disaster area," charging that Mexico's relations with both the U.S. and Latin America had deteriorated during his sexenio. He criticized Fox's failure to reach an immigration accord with the U.S., while reiterating the importance of one. He strongly emphasized the need for greater fiscal federalism, providing states and municipalities with more resources to address local problems.

Playing perhaps his strongest card, he sought to claim the political center, portraying his two main rivals as immoderate.

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Minor Party Candidates Remain Minor

14. (SBU) Alternativa Candidate Patricia Mercado, in many respects the star of the first debate for her articulate and high-minded presentation, failed to reprise her earlier performance. Although she stuck to the issues, she proved less focused and more tentative than in the first debate and scored poorly in the post-debate polls. It remains to be seen whether her party continues to poll above the 2% threshold needed to gain official registration. For his part, Roberto Campa took a much more measured approach than in the first debate, when his nearly histrionic performance was widely ridiculed. In his closing remarks, he acknowledged that he could not win the presidency, but urged voters to ensure that the values and principles of the Nueva Alianza were represented in Congress by splitting their ticket and casting one of their ballots for his party. He proposed that all five candidates commit themselves to accepting the election results, a challenge accepted by all of his rivals except AMLO.

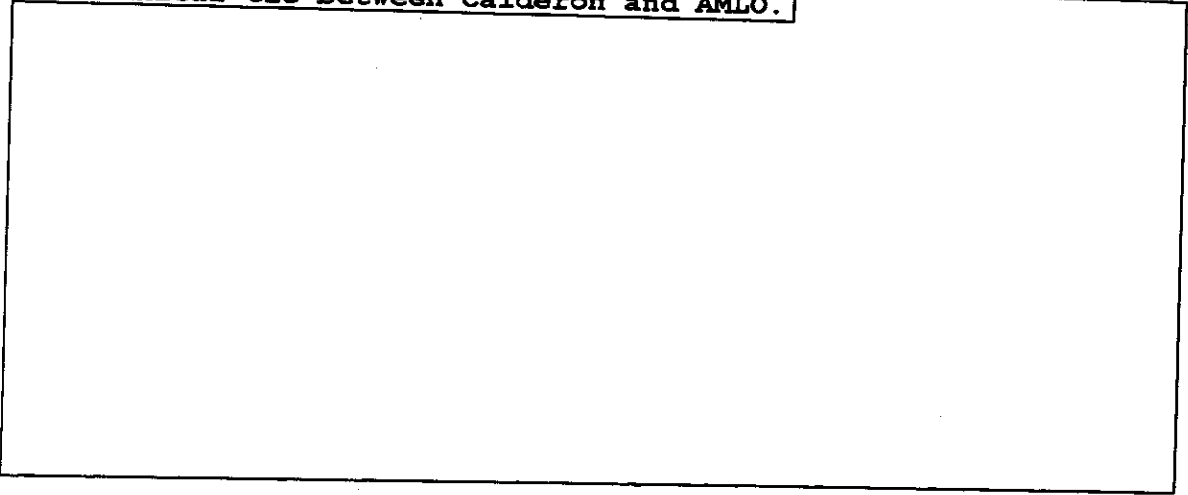
Comment: A Split Decision and the Race Goes On

15. (C) Because last night's debate ended in what was

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widely perceived to be a "split decision," it is difficult to predict the impact it will have on the race, which remains in a technical tie between Calderon and AMLO.



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